

Testimony Submitted by Jade Thomas to the Appropriations Committee
Governor's Proposed FY 24-25 Budget for Elementary and Secondary Education
February 23, 2023

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking members, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Jade Thomas and I am the Connecticut Policy Associate at All Our Kin. All Our Kin is a nationally-recognized nonprofit that trains and supports more than 650 licensed, home-based child care providers in Connecticut. These child care professionals have the capacity to care for more than 3,400 of the state's youngest children.

Child care fuels our workforce. It equips children with the skills they need to succeed in school and life, while enabling parents to work and creating jobs for the providers who care for them. A strong early childhood workforce is the foundation of a strong economy, which is why I am here today to urge you to:

- support a \$7,500 increase in compensation for every child care educator next year, and
- build on this in fiscal year 2025, so child care educators can achieve compensation parity with public school teachers.

This funding will not only stabilize the existing workforce but put the state on a pathway to addressing a long-broken system. Family child care educators are doing their part, we're asking that the state join them.

Home-based child care businesses, also known as family child care providers, are an essential part of Connecticut's early care and education system. They meet the diverse needs of parents and caregivers throughout the state. Their programs are a lifeline for families that face the greatest barriers to accessing care Connecticut's most overburdened, under-resourced families, such as families with infants and toddlers, families that work nontraditional hours, and families that lack access to reliable transportation. These businesses offer a number of benefits including:

- Intimate, family-like settings
- Mixed-aged groups which allow siblings care be cared for in the same setting
- Language, culture, and values that reflect the communities served

Access to positive early learning environments like those offered in family child care is critical. Research shows that during a child's first three years of life they experience their most rapid growth and development. The foundation established in the early years can put children on the road to success later in life.

Early educators offer an invaluable service to young children and their communities. However, this importance isn't reflected in their compensation. Throughout the pandemic family child care educators were correctly recognized as essential workers and lauded as heroes. While this sentiment remains, so does the stagnant funding for early care and education. Educators' compensation is so low that many can't afford to stay in this field.

The Governor's budget doesn't do anything to improve providers' compensation, and this is limiting families' access to child care. [Data](#) from the Office of Early Childhood and UConn show that on average family child care educators, who typically work 65 hours a week, earn less than \$9 an hour with no benefits. The Connecticut United Way estimated that the [Household Survival Budget](#) for 2022 (the actual bare-minimum costs of basic necessities) was more than 100,000 on average for a family of four. We have unconsciously decided that the workforce educating our children should have to choose between the work of nurturing and educating children or feeding their own families.

A state payment model that reimburses providers based on an artificially low market rate system, rather than on what it really costs to provide care is a losing one. The Governor's proposed 10% Care 4 Kids rate increase barely covers Connecticut's inflation rate, which ranged from 7-9% last year. In the end families pay the price. In Connecticut, there continues to be an acute lack of high quality, affordable child care, especially for families that face the greatest barriers to accessing care. In fact, the Office of Early Childhood reported that there is a shortage of more than 25,000 infant-toddler slots in the state. If we don't address compensation educators will continue to leave the field or retire early, which only exacerbates the current crisis. Small one-time payments and short-term fixes are a band-aid. Educators cannot continue to fill in the gaps where state investment should be.

To build a stable workforce and fuel a strong economy the state must make the necessary investment of \$700 million in child care to increase compensation for early educators.

Thank you for your consideration.

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